

BYZANTINE SILVER STAMPS:
SUPPLEMENT II
MORE TREASURE FROM SYRIA

ERICA CRUIKSHANK DODD

THREE silver vessels were recently added to the Collection of the Abegg-Stiftung, Bern. They are reputed to have been found in Syria "fifty years ago."¹ Apart from their intrinsic aesthetic value, these objects—a cup and two ewers without handles—are exceptionally interesting on two accounts: first, they throw into deeper mystery the fascinating problem of the Riha and Stuma treasures discovered near Aleppo around 1909; second, they offer solid support and further documentation to the story of stamped silver from Constantinople.

In my book *Byzantine Silver Stamps* (Dumbarton Oaks Studies, VII [1961], abbreviated here as *BSS*), I explored the system of control marks applied to silver in the Byzantine Empire. The first supplement to the book appeared in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 18 (1964), and I stated there my intention to record new silver pieces with stamps as they came to my notice so that this material might be used in conjunction with the main text until the time came to rework the entire corpus. The three Abegg pieces have regular Constantinopolitan stamps which are, accordingly, the subject of this paper.

¹ This information was thoughtfully supplied by Mrs. Paul Mallon. Mrs. Mallon kindly drew my attention to these vessels and supplied precise answers to many questions. I am much indebted to Dr. Michael Stettler, Director of the Abegg-Stiftung, Bern, for his cordial hospitality in the Museum at Riggisberg, where I was given the opportunity to study the vessels and their stamps and where I was offered every possible kind of assistance.

No. 27.1. DECORATED CUP





ABEGG-STIFTUNG, BERN

DESCRIPTION: Small cup (fig. a) decorated with a gilded foliate design alternating with stylized leaves over a swelling, embossed base. Around the rim the niello inscription: + VΠEP EYXHC K(α) CΩTHPIAC CEPΓIOV TPIB(OVNOV) K(α) APΓYPOΠPATOY K(α) ANAΠAVCEΩC MAPIAC THC AVTOY CVMBIOY K(α) TΩN AVTΩN ΓΩNEΩN (compare no. 27).

Ht. 14.8 cm.

PLACE OF DISCOVERY: Acquired, along with two silver vases, nos. 31.1 and 31.2, in 1964. The three vessels are reputed to have been in the same family of landowners in Northern Syria for over fifty years.

CONTROL STAMPS: Five stamps are clearly visible — a round, a hexagonal, a square, a long, and a cruciform (fig. b). They are worn near the centering point, which suggests that the cup was worked on after it was stamped. The readings were taken from the object:

- Nimbed bust, type 2; inscribed CTEΦ||A(NOV) (see the corresponding stamp on no. 27).
- ◊ Monogram of Justin II, type a (*BSS*, p. 13f.); inscribed MEΓA||AOV. There is a small bust above the monogram. This stamp appears to be identical with the corresponding stamps on nos. 27 and 29. 
- ◻ Monogram may read KΩNCTANTINOV (see the monograms in the hexagonal stamp of no. 28 and in the square stamp of no. 29; explanation in *BSS*, p. 12); inscribed ΘEOΠ||... 
- ◻ Bust type 2; monogram ΠETPOV, as in the cross, and also found in the corresponding stamps on nos. 27 and 28; inscribed (I)ΩA||(NNIC) (see nos. 27 and 28). 
- ⊕ Flared arms; monogram ΠETPOV as above; inscribed in a circular direction +CE||BA||(CT||OV) (see no. 27). 

DATE: The imperial bust in the round stamp (type 2) could belong to Justin II, Tiberius Constantine, or Mauricius Tiberius. The monogram in the hexagon is that of Justin II, type a, and the monogram in the square resembles the monogram in the hexagon of no. 28, and the square of no. 29, attributed to Tiberius Constantine. This unusual combination of imperial monograms also appears in the square and hexagonal stamps of no. 29. The long and cross stamps are similar to the corresponding stamps on no. 27, from the reign of Justin II. These factors suggest a transitional period close to the reign of Justin II but actually in the short reign of Tiberius Constantine, A.D. 578–582.

Unpublished.

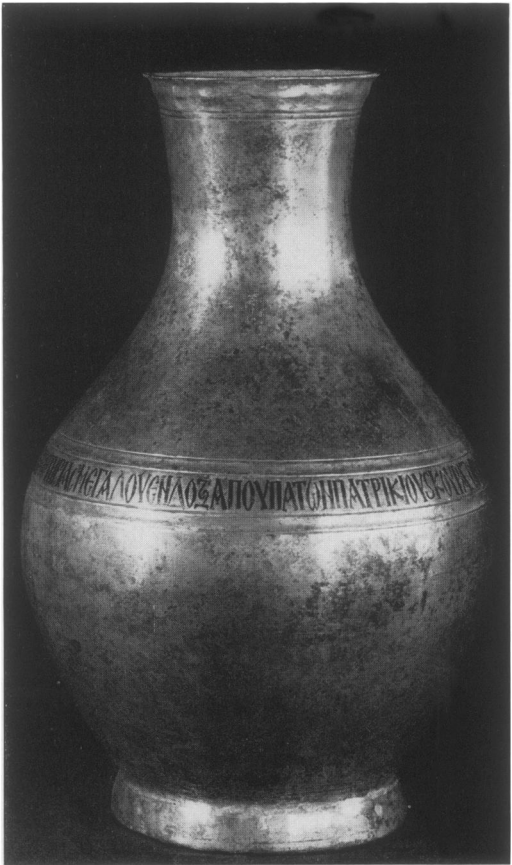
Source of Illustration: Reproduced by permission of the Abegg-Stiftung, Bern.



a. Decorated Cup



b. The Stamps



a. Ewer "A" from Syria



b. The Stamps

No. 31.1. EWER "A" FROM SYRIA




ABEGG-STIFTUNG, BERN

DESCRIPTION: Plain ewer (fig. a) with band of incised niello inscription around the body: + VΠΕΡ CΩΤΗΡΙΑC ΜΕΓΑΛΟΝ ΕΝΔΟΞ (ΟΝ) ΑΠΟ VΠΑΤΩΝ ΠΑΤΡΙΚΙΟΝ (Καί) ΚΟΝΡΑΤΟΡΟC ΤΟΝ ΕΥCΕΒΕCΤΑΤΟΝ ΗΜΩΝ ΔΕCΠΟΤΟΝ (Καί) ΑΝΑΠΑΥCΕΩC ΠΕΤΡΟΝ ΠΕΛΑΓΙΑC (Καί) ΝΟΝΝΟΝ (see no. 31.2).

Ht. 32.5 cm.

PLACE OF DISCOVERY: Acquired, with its companion, no. 31.2, and the cup, no. 27.1, in 1964.

CONTROL STAMPS: Only four stamps are visible beneath the patina — a round, a square, a long, and a cruciform (fig. b). They are very worn and it is impossible to determine whether they were applied before or after the ewer was inscribed. The readings were taken from the object:

- Nimbed bust, type 2; inscribed (+ΜΑΞ)||ΙΜΟ(С) (see the square stamp of no. 30).
- The monogram appears to be that of Mauricius (see nos. 30, 31); inscription illegible. 
- Nimbed bust, type 2; cruciform monogram ΜΑΡΙΑΝΟΝ (see p. 148, note 10), also found in the cross stamp of this vessel, but seen most clearly in the cross stamp of no. 31.2; inscribed +ΠΑΤ(Ρ)||ΙΚΙC (see the long stamp of no. 31.2 and the round, hexagonal, and long stamps of nos. 30 and 31). 
- ⊕ Double strike; flared arms; cruciform monogram as above; inscribed in a circular direction (+)Θ||Ω||Μ(Α||С)? (see the corresponding stamp on no. 31.2, and on nos. 29, 30, 31, as well as the round stamp of no. 28). 

DATE: The imperial bust, type 2, could belong to Justin II, Tiberius Constantine, or Mauricius Tiberius. The monogram in the square, however, appears to be that of Mauricius, A.D. 582–602, and the names inscribed in the long, round, and cruciform stamps relate to the names on stamps from the reign of Mauricius. The recurrence of the name ΘΩΜΑ in the cross stamp, and a similar name in the corresponding stamps of nos. 29, 30, and 31, as well as in the round stamp of no. 28 (Tiberius Constantine) suggest a relatively early date in the reign of Mauricius, but no other relationships indicate precise placement.

Unpublished.

Source of Illustration: Reproduced by permission of the Abegg-Stiftung, Bern.

No. 31.2. EWER "B" FROM SYRIA

ABEGG-STIFTUNG, BERN

DESCRIPTION: Plain ewer (fig. a) with band of incised niello inscription around the body: + VΠEP CΩTHPIAC MEΓAΛOV ENΔOΞ (OV) AΠO VΠATΩN ΠATPIKIOV (Kai) KOVPA TOPOC TOV EVCEBECTATOV HMΩN ΔECΠOTOV (Kai) ANATAVCEΩC ΠETPOV ΠEΛAΓIAC (Kai) NONNOV (see no. 31.1).

Ht. 32.5 cm.

PLACE OF DISCOVERY: Acquired, with its companion, no. 31.1, and the cup, no. 27.1, in 1964.

CONTROL STAMPS: Only four stamps are visible — two round, a long, and a cruciform (fig. b). The stamps appear to have been damaged during subsequent beating of the silver, especially in the area of the centering point. The readings were taken from the object.

○ Imperial bust, type 2; inscribed + MAΞ||MO(C) (see the corresponding stamp on no. 31.1 and the square stamp on no. 30).

○ Same as above; imperial bust, type 2; inscribed (MAΞ||I) MOC

□ Nimbed bust, type 2; monogram MAPIANOV (see no. 31.1); inscribed (ΠA)TP|
|IKI (C) (similar to the corresponding stamp on no. 31.1).



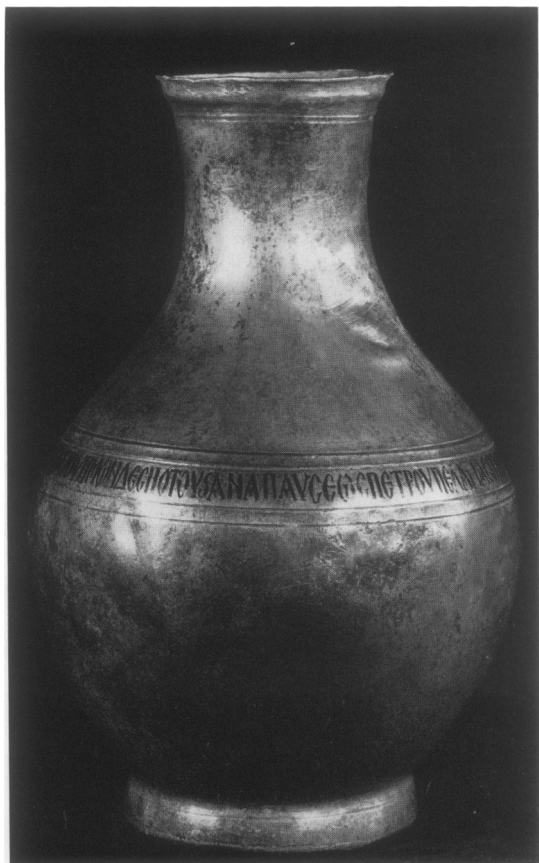
⊕ Flared arms; monogram as above; inscribed in a circular direction + Θ||ω||M
(A||C) (similar to the corresponding stamp on no. 31.1).



DATE: These stamps appear to be identical with the corresponding stamps on no. 31.1, and the ewer is dated accordingly in the early part of the reign of Mauricius Tiberius, A.D. 582–602.

Unpublished.

Source of Illustration: Reproduced by permission of the Abegg-Stiftung, Bern.



a. Ewer "B" from Syria



b. The Stamps

COMMENTARY

Before discussing the stamps it is relevant to outline the relationship between the Abegg silver and the Syrian treasures with which it is clearly associated. Both Abegg ewers, nos. 31.1 and 31.2, have identical inscriptions in niello, which read in translation: "For the salvation of Megalos, glorious ex-consul, patricius and curator of our most pious sovereign, and for the peace of soul of Peter, son of Pelagia, and of Nonnous."²

A couple, Megalos and Nonnous, are mentioned in a similar inscription on the Riha paten.³ What is more, the inscription on the Abegg cup, no. 27.1, is very nearly identical with the inscription on the Stuma paten.⁴ This inscription refers to Sergius, the silversmith, and his wife, Maria, and in the interval between the times when the paten and the cup were made Sergius had evidently acquired the additional title of *tribounos*. There is little doubt that the same gentleman gave the paten and the cup to the same church, the stamps on each vessel attesting to a brief interval of time between them. What is more, the Abegg pieces were reputed in 1964 to have been found "fifty years ago." Thus, the date of their discovery approximately coincides with the date 1909 or 1910 when the Riha and Stuma treasures were discovered. The fact that the Abegg silver remained in the same family after its discovery adds reliability to the account.

The total number of silver pieces directly related to the Riha and Stuma treasures is six: The Riha Paten (*BSS*, no. 20) and the Riha Flabellum (*BSS*, no. 21); The Stuma Paten (*BSS*, no. 27) and the Stuma Flabellum (*BSS*, no. 22); and two plates, only one of which has stamps (*BSS*, no. 29), in the Archaeological Museum, Istanbul. Marvin Ross gives evidence that points to *eight* pieces having been discovered with the Riha Paten, and discusses the likelihood that the Stuma and Riha treasures were in reality one and the same.⁵ Two other silver vessels have indeed been associated with the Riha treasure, the Tyler Chalice (*BSS*, no. 8) and the British Museum Chalice.⁶ This makes up the number eight. If, however, we now associate with these the Abegg vessels, the picture is again thrown into doubt: Were the Riha and Stuma treasures actually one and the same? If they were the same treasure and the Abegg vessels are added, the total number of vessels amounts to eleven rather than eight. If they were not found at the same time, when were they found, and where?

In spite of the mystery surrounding the discovery of these treasures, the Abegg pieces substantially contribute to our understanding of the story of Syrian silver in the sixth century. I expect to publish shortly a study of Syrian

² For the transcription of the inscriptions I am most grateful to have been able to consult with members of the *Institut d'archéologie français à Beyrouth*.

³ *BSS*, no. 20. A full bibliography is listed by Marvin Ross, *Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Mediaeval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, I, Metalwork, Ceramics, Glass, Glyptics, Painting* (Washington, D.C., 1962), no. 10.

⁴ Given under the description of this piece in the Catalogue, no. 27, and in the description of no. 27.1.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 11 ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

silver work based on the documentation of the stamps. Meanwhile the purpose of this paper is to record the stamps on the Abegg silver, to indicate their position relative to the main series, and to point out their significance.

Unlike the stamps published in *Supplement I*, the stamps on the Abegg silver are all satisfyingly regular and appear to belong to the Constantinopolitan series.⁷ It is true that there are irregularities in the imperial monograms in the square and hexagonal stamps of no. 27.1, but, since these irregularities only repeat those already discussed in *Byzantine Silver Stamps* in connection with nos. 28 and 29, they reinforce rather than detract from the original argument. It would appear that in the brief reign of Tiberius Constantine (A.D. 578–582) the stamping system was not properly reorganized.

The fact that four rather than five stamps are found on nos. 31.1 and 31.2 is not unusual.⁸ Another irregularity evident in the stamps of Mauricius is the recurrence of the imperial monogram in the long stamp,⁹ but this oddity appears not to be present in the stamps of the Abegg ewers from the same reign. The secondary monogram in the long and cross stamps of the Abegg ewers resembles the monogram on a seal published by G. Schlumberger¹⁰ where the name is given as ΜΑΡΙΑΝΟΒ ΑΠΟ ΥΠΑΩΝ. This title is honorary and may be translated as “ex-consul.” It may well have belonged to a *comes sacrarum largitionum* in the reign of Mauricius, but no dignitary of this name is yet known.

The inscription ΠΑΤΡΙΚΙΣ, which occurs in the long stamps of nos. 31.1 and 31.2, occurs also in the long, hexagonal, and round stamps of nos. 30 and 31. Although the word may represent a title, it is more likely to be a personal name.¹¹ It occurs again in hexagonal stamps at the end of the Constantinopolitan series, nos. 72 and 73. Since it is common both as a name and as a title, it is difficult to infer any relationship between it and the inscribed title in niello around the rim of the same two ewers, nos. 31.1 and 31.2 in the Abegg Collection. Rather more significant is the appearance of the name ΜΕΓΑΛΟΣ in the stamps of no. 27.1 from the reign of Tiberius, and nos. 27 and 29 from the reigns of Justin II and Tiberius respectively. Megalos is not a common name and throughout the series it appears only on these examples. One wonders if it is coincidence that the same name appears in the niello inscription in the ewers, from the reign of Mauricius. From the inscription it is clear that Megalos was an important official in the imperial hierarchy in Constantinople, and it is tempting to suggest that he began, in the reign of Justin II (no. 27), as an

⁷ It is tempting to read the name ΘΕΟΠ || (ΟΛΙΣ) for the square stamp on this vessel, i.e., “Antioch” (compare the long stamps of nos. 89 and 90. See also the long stamp inscribed ΤΑΡ || C(OC) on no. 19.1 [*BSS, Supplement I*]), but many Greek names begin with the letters ΘΕΟΠ and there is therefore no real basis for this inference. In any event, like the stamps on no. 19.1, all other features of the stamps on no. 27.1 relate them to the imperial series. There is only a superficial resemblance between them and the Antiochene stamps on nos. 89 and 90.

⁸ See *BSS*, p. 8, note 26.

⁹ *Ibid.*, nos. 30, 31, and pp. 14, 15.

¹⁰ Gustave Schlumberger, *Sigillographie de l'Empire Byzantin* (Paris, 1884; reprint, Turin, 1963), p. 477, no. 7.

¹¹ *BSS*, p. 17. If a title, then the spelling would more likely be either πατρίκιος or πατρίκιου (compare the inscription on nos. 31.1 and 31.2).

official in Constantinople whose duty it was to guarantee the quality of silver by means of his personal stamp. By the time of Mauricius, he was "glorious ex-consul, patricius and curator," and no longer applied his personal name to the stamps.¹² Indeed, we might pursue the relationship one step further back: since there is clearly a relationship between the inscriptions on the Abegg vessels and those on the Riha and Stuma Patens, we may infer the progression of Megalos from the time of his first donation to the church, the Riha paten, around A.D. 577. At that time he had no titles; he was married to Nonnous and had children. For the next five years or more, during the last years of the reign of Justin II and throughout the reign of Tiberius, Megalos resided in Constantinople guaranteeing the quality of imperial silver by means of his personal stamp. Early in the reign of Mauricius, at the time of the Abegg vessels 31.1 and 31.2, the fortunes of Megalos were less happy, for he had lost his wife Nonnous and also Peter, the son of Pelagia. Meanwhile, however, he had acquired some formidable titles. For the present the story of Megalos must remain conjectural. Nevertheless, the relationship between the inscription on the Abegg vessels and the stamps in the same series offers our first clue to the identity of the officials whose names are inscribed in the stamps.

Finally, the three pieces from the Abegg Collection bear stamps from a period that has been relatively poorly represented, the reigns of Tiberius and Mauricius. Until their discovery only four vessels with stamps from this period were known. The new evidence adds to the documentation for the transitional period between the important series of stamps under Justinian I and Justin II, and the long series under the Emperors Phocas and Heraclius.

¹² A description of these titles is found in E. Hanton, "Lexique explicatif du recueil des inscriptions grecques chrétiennes d'Asie Mineure," *Byzantion*, IV (1927-1928), *passim*. These titles are frequent in inscriptions and in seals from this period and especially in this area (see G. Schlumberger, *op. cit.*, *passim*; Louis Jalabert and René Mouterde, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, I-IV [Paris, 1929-1955]). For the titles of the Emperor, compare the inscription, *ibid.*, IV, no. 1675 ter.). Although the titles of Megalos all signify a most exalted office, the designation of this office is yet imprecise, since in the sixth and seventh centuries the titles were used by all the greatest offices in the imperial capital, and the name Megalos does not occur in the sources for this period.